

William Polke Papers
L333
1808-1853, bulk 1832-1841
1 mss. box

Rare Books and Manuscripts Division
Indiana State Library

Processed by: Christina Baich, April 2006
Finding aid updated: Laura Eliason, 11/14/2015

Biographical Note:

William Polke was born on September 17, 1775, in Brooke County, Virginia. He moved to Kentucky around 1782. Late that year, his family was captured by Indians and transported to Michigan. In 1797, he married Sarah Cooper with whom he had at least one daughter, Mary Polke. They moved to Knox County, Indiana, around 1807. Polke served in a number of public offices including justice of the peace in Knox County (1808); member of the Territorial House of Representatives (1814-1815); Knox County associate judge (1823); and Knox County probate judge (1829-1831). From 1824 to 1825, he was a missionary teacher among the Ottawa Indians in Michigan. He also served as a delegate to the Indiana Constitutional Convention in 1816. Polke moved to Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1841, and died there on April 26, 1843.

Polke was instrumental in the removal of the Potawatomi Indians from northern Indiana, leading emigration trips. Between 1834 and 1842, two groups of Potawatomi were removed from the Midwest to lands west of the Mississippi. Those living in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin were moved to Council Bluffs, Iowa, while the Potawatomi of southern Michigan and northern Indiana were moved to eastern Kansas.

Sources:

Shepherd, Rebecca A., Charles W. Calhoun, Elizabeth Shanahan-Shoemaker, and Alan F. January, comp. *A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly, Volume 1, 1816-1899*. Indianapolis: The Select Committee on the Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly, 1980.

Sultzman, Lee. "Potawatomi History." *First Nations Histories*. 18 Dec. 1998. 12 Apr. 2006.
<<http://www.tolatsga.org/pota.html>>.

Scope and Content Note:

The bulk of the collection is Photostat copies of Polke's correspondence regarding the Potawatomi Indians and his role in their removal from northern Indiana as well as other political matters. There are also letters from his daughter, Mary Polke Niles, and between he and his son-in-law, John B. Niles. Among his other correspondents are Samuel Merrill, Samuel Milroy, and Waller Taylor.

In addition to the correspondence, the collection includes a transcript of Polke's account of the capture of his family by Indians in Kentucky in 1782. The account was originally published in Daniel McDonald's Removal of the Pottawattomie Indians from Northern Indiana. Also included is the manuscript report of William Polke and Thomas S. Hinds to Governor William Hendricks of Indiana and Governor Edward Coles of Illinois on the navigation of the Wabash River.

Folder Listing:

Folder

1. 1808-1829
 2. 1832-1836
 3. 1837-15 Sept. 1838
 4. 16 Sept.-Dec. 1838
 5. 1839
 6. 1840-1841
 7. 1842-1853, undated
 8. Journal pages, Sept.-Dec. 1838
 9. Account of the captivity of the family of Charles Polke, typescript, 14 p.
 10. Report relative to the navigation of the Wabash, 1823 Nov. 12, manuscript, 7 p.
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Collection Information:

<i>Size of Collection:</i>	1 manuscript box
<i>Collection Dates:</i>	1808-1853, bulk 1832-1841
<i>Provenance:</i>	Various donors, unknown dates
<i>Access:</i>	This collection is open for research.
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<i>Language</i>	Materials are entirely in English
<i>Alternate Formats:</i>	None
<i>Related Holdings:</i>	L116, John B. Niles papers S370, Jesse C. Douglass journal
<i>Notes:</i>	
